

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 /056 W

-----070808Z 066924 /11

R 061358Z MAY 77

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3251

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMCONSUL MADRAS

CINCPAC

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 6593

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJECT: BRAHMANANDA REDDY ELECTED CONGRESS PRESIDENT AT STORMY
AICC SESSION

REF: NEW DELHI A-74

1. SUMMARY: LATE ON MAY6, DELEGATES ATTENDING A TWO-DAY MEETING OF THE A11-INDIA CONGRESS COMMITTEE (AICC) ELECTED FORMER HOME MINISTER K. BRAHMANANDA REDDY AS CONGRESS PRESIDENT BY A LARGE MAJORITY, DEFEATING S.S. RAY. THE VOTE ENDED TWO DAYS OF OFTEN ACRIMONIOUS DEBATE AND MUTUAL RECRIMINATIONS OVER FIXING BLAME FOR THE PARTY'S MARCH DEFEAT. REDDY'S VICTORY OVER THE
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FORMER CHIEF MINISTER OF WEST BENGAL IS SEEN BY SOME AS A VICTORY FOR THE PRO-MRS. GANDHI FACTION. CONVERSELY, THE "LEFTISTS" APPEAR TO HAVE SUFFERED A SETBACK. MRS. GANDHI APPARENTLY PLAYED AN IMPORTANT BEHIND-THE-SCENES ROLE IN THE MANEUVERING. ALTHOUGH SHE WILL PROBABLY REMAIN IN THE BACKGROUND FOR SOME TIME, SHE APPEARS TO HAVE A RESPONSIVE FIGURE AS CONGRESS PRESIDENT.
END SUMMARY.

2. THE DISSOLUTION OF THE CONGRESS GOVTS IN NINE STATES LAST WEEKEND AND THE CERTAINTY OF FRESH ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS PROMPTED THE AICC TO ADVANCE THE DATES FOR ITS POST MORTEM SESSION FROM MID-MAY TO MAY 5-6. THE MEETING, WAS PRIMARILY INTENDED TO ENERGIZE THE PARTY FOR THE JUNE STATE ASSEMBLY POLLS. A BRAVELY-WORDED RESOLUTION WAS PASSED IN WHICH THE CONGRESS RESOLVED TO ACCEPT THE ELECTORATE'S VERDICT WITH "HUMILITY". HOWEVER, MANY OF THE AICC MEMBERS SEEMED MORE INTERESTED IN MUTUAL RECRIMINATION AND FIXING THE BLAME FOR THE MARCH DEBACLE.

3. FORMER INDUSTRY MINISTER T.A. PAI SET OFF AN ACRIMONIOUS DEBATE MAY 5 WITH A SCATHING ATTACK ON SANJAY GANDHI AND HIS INTIMATES AS THE DE FACTO RULERS OF INDIA. PAI, NORMALLY KNOWN AS A TECHNOCRAT, CHARGED THAT SANJAY HAD HAD ACCESS TO ALL OFFICIAL FILES EVEN THOUGH HE OCCUPIED NO GOVT POSITION. IN ADDITION, SANJAY AND HIS "CAUCUS" HARASSED MINISTERS AND SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS WHO REFUSED TO DO THEIR BIDDING. FOLLOWING PAI'S ANGRY REMARKS, WHICH SOME VIEWED AS AN IMPLICIT INDICTMENT OF MRS. GANDHI, DELEGATES QUICKLY FORMED BATTLE LINES INTO PRO AND ANTI-INDIRA FACTIONS. MEMBERS OF THE "LEFT" ANTI-SANJAY FACTION, CLUSTERED AROUND D. K. BAROOAH, K.D. MALAVIYA, CHANDRAJIT YADAV AND P.R. DAS MUNSHI, CRITICIZED THE "CAUCUS" LESS STRENUOUSLY THAN PAI BUT IN STILL UNMISTAKEABLE TERMS. THEY ALSO URGED THE CONGRESS TO UNITE WITH "LEFT AND DEMOCRATIC FORCES", A EUPHEMISM FOR THE CPI, AS ITS BRIGHTEST HOPE FOR RECOVERY. ALTHOUGH THEY DID NOT CRITICIZE MRS. GANDHI AS SUCH, THEIR ATTACKS ON THE "CAUCUS" WERE SEEN AS AN IMPLIED ACCUSATION. ON THE OTHER SIDE, PRO-MRS. GANDHI CONGRESSMEN SOUGHT TO DEFEND HER ACTIONS AND PRAISED THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ACHIEVEMENTS OF HER ADMINISTRATION. MANY OF THESE SPEAKERS URGED THE DELEGATES TO FORGET THE PAST AND GET ON WITH THE JOB OF RESTORING THE PARTY. SOME EVEN CALLED UPON MRS. GANDHI TO LEAD THE CONGRESS OUT OF ITS PRESENT DOLDRUMS. IT APPEARS THAT MANY CONGRESSMEN SAT ON THE SIDELINES DURING THE DEBATE.

4. THE FORMER PM HERSELF MADE A BRIEF APPEARANCE AT THE MAY 5 SESSION. IN HER REMARKS, MRS. GANDHI URGED THE DELEGATES TO PUT ASIDE THEIR DIFFERENCES IN ORDER TO RESTORE PARTY UNITY. SHE REPORTEDLY BROKE INTO TEARS AT THE END WHEN SHE THANKED CONGRESS WORKERS FOR THEIR SUPPORT IN GOOD TIMES AND BAD.

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5. ALTHOUGH MRS. GANDHI DID NOT ATTEND THE REST OF THE
SESSION, MAY DELEGATES DETECTED HER HAND IN THE
DEVELOPING BATTLE OVER ELECTING A NEW CONGRESS PRESIDENT.
FORMER WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER S.S. RAY WAS WIDELY
VIEWED AS THE CHOICE OF THE "LEFT" ANTI-SANJAY FACTION,
WHILE FORMER HOME MINISTER K. BRAHMANANDE REDDY WAS SEEN
AS MRS. GANDHI'S CANDIDATE. THE WATERS WERE MUDDIED
SOMEWHAT WHEN FORMER HOME MINISTER DR. KARAN SINGH AND
NEK RAM SHARMA, AN MLA FROM UP, ANNOUNCED THEIR
CANDIDACIES. ONLY REDDY AND RAY WERE VIEWED AS SERIOUS
CANDIDATES, HOWEVER, AND THE FACTIONS WHICH LINED UP
BEHIND THEM MORE OF LESS COINCIDED WITH THE BATTLE
LINES DRAWN UP IN THE DEBATES OVER FIXING BLAME.
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6. THE VOTE MARKED THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1950 THAT
THERE HAD BEEN AN OPEN CONTEST FOR THE CONGRESS
PRESIDENCY. REDDY SECURED 319 VOTES TO RAY' 160.
KARAN SINGH WON 16 VOTES AND SHARMA THREE.
REDDY'S ELECTION WAS QUICKLY FOLLOWED BY THE ANGRY

RESIGNATION FROM THE CONGRESS OF K. RAGHURAMIAH,
AN MP FROM ANDHRA PRADESH AND FORMER MINISTER FOR
PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS IN MRS. GANDHI'S CABINET.
RAGHURAMIAH HAS LONG BEEN OPPOSED TO THE IDEA
OF REDDY BECOMING CONGRESS PRESIDENT, AN
OPPOSITION MORE LIKELY BASED ON CASTE DIFFERENCES
IN ANDHRA THAN ON IDEOLOGICAL GROUNDS.

7. COMMENT: TO THE EXTENT THAT REDDY WAS WIDELY
REGARDED AS MRS. GANDHI'S CHOICE, HIS ELECTION
MAY BE VIEWED AS A VICTORY FOR THE FORMER PM AND
AN INDICATION THAT SHE STILL COMMANDS CONSIDERABLE
SUPPORT AND SYMPATHY AMONG CONGRESS LEADERS.
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